

Measured values range from 85 to 124 ppb. Ozone levels in this range are considered moderate.

## Communication System, continued---

When any of the connected monitors detects ozone above the federal health standard for outdoor air (120 parts per billion), the TNRCC central computer sends an electronic notice to the Harris County Office of Emergency Management (OEM). The Harris County OEM server sends email and pager notifications to those who have signed up to be notified. Ozone warnings are issued when additional monitors detect ozone over the federal health standard. No “all clear” will be issued after ozone levels drop because ozone typically dissipates after sunset. Real-time pictures of ozone conditions are available on the TNRCC web site at <http://www.tnrcc.state.tx.us>.

So far more than 1,000 entities have requested notification. Anyone who has access to email can request to be included on the notification list through the following URL: <http://www.hcoem.org>.

## Ozone Watch

When the TNRCC meteorological team predicts that atmospheric conditions are favorable for formation of high levels of ozone, an Ozone Watch is issued. Normally the TNRCC team makes its prediction by 3 p.m. each day for the next day’s Ozone Watch. Occasionally, the TNRCC team will be unable to make its prediction until 9 a.m. on the day for which an Ozone Watch is issued. Ozone Watches do not predict specific ozone levels or specific locations within the nonattainment area.

Ozone Watches are distributed by the TNRCC to the National Weather Service (NWS), Harris County Office

of Emergency Management and other recipients. The NWS distributes Ozone Watches using normal communication channels as a public information statement to media and other recipients. NWS will also broadcast Ozone Watches on weather radios without an alert signal.

## Ozone Warning – Levels

Ozone Warnings indicating the level of air pollution and recommended actions are a new feature of the Ozone Warning system. The system uses the Air Quality Index (AQI) established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1999. The new system includes colors and names to represent the quality of outdoor air in words or on maps. TNRCC has established an ozone map for the area that uses the colors described in the box at the bottom of this page.

When any of the 22 monitors detects ozone in the “unhealthy” or “very unhealthy” ranges, the TNRCC will notify the NWS which will carry Level Red and Level Purple Warnings. A Civil Emergency Message will be generated with request for immediate broadcast. This will be sent out via normal communication channels to all media outlets. It will also be available to all other users who have access to the NWS information and will be posted on the NWS page. This warning will be re-issued if the Ozone Warning is upgraded from Level Red to Level Purple. When the initial Ozone Warning (Level Red or Level Purple) is issued, it will be broadcast on the weather radio in both Galveston and Houston with the tone alert activated. If the Ozone Warning is upgraded from Level Red to Level Purple, a new message will be generated and will be broadcast on the weather radio with tone and the message.

### Air Quality Index (Category Index Values, Descriptors and Colors)

<u>Index Value</u>	<u>Descriptor</u>	<u>Color</u>	<u>1 hour Ozone ppb</u>
<b>0-50</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Green</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>51-100</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Yellow</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>101-150</b>	<b>Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups</b>	<b>Orange</b>	<b>125-164</b>
<b>151-200</b>	<b>Unhealthy</b>	<b>Red</b>	<b>165-204</b>
<b>201-300</b>	<b>Very Unhealthy</b>	<b>Purple</b>	<b>205-404</b>
<b>301-500</b>	<b>Hazardous</b>	<b>Maroon</b>	<b>405-604</b>

## Ozone Air Pollution

Spring is in the air and so is ozone air pollution. As the weather gets warmer and sunnier in Houston, we can expect to have high levels of ozone in the outdoor air. Ozone forms when gases such as nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons are exposed to sunlight. The haze you see in the air on sunny, still days is often a good indicator that ozone levels are rising.

Ozone is harmful because it irritates the airways and makes it harder to breathe. Adults and children who spend a lot of time outdoors during the day and people with breathing problems such as asthma and allergies are particularly vulnerable to the pollutant's effects. If you or someone you know falls into one of these categories, it is especially important to know when and how to protect yourself.

Recently, the HDHHS Bureau of Air Policy worked with several public and private organizations in the Houston area to create a system of communication to alert people when ozone levels exceed health standards. One of the primary methods of alert is through e-mail. When local outdoor air monitors detect high levels of ozone, they alert a central computer system which automatically generates an email ozone warning message. The message indicates where and when high ozone levels are detected. It also lists the groups of people who are most affected and the actions they should take to protect

***The longer you exert yourself outdoors when ozone levels are high, the more likely you are to be affected.***

themselves. You can sign up to receive the notifications by visiting the Harris County Office of Emergency Management's website at <http://www.hcoem.org> and clicking on "subscribe to ozone alerts".

The most important thing to remember when protecting yourself and your family from ozone is that the longer you exert yourself outdoors when ozone levels are high, the more likely you are to be affected. Children are generally more vulnerable than adults because they spend more time outdoors doing vigorous activity such as running and playing. Children have a higher breathing rate than adults relative to their body weight and lung surface area. This results in a greater dose of pollution delivered to their lungs. During periods of high ozone levels, it is better to stay inside in air-conditioning as much as possible and plan activities that limit the amount of time spent outdoors.

## Birth & Death Certificates Vital Statistics Information

### Address, Phone Numbers, Office Hours

Houston Department of Health and Human  
Services - Bureau of Vital Statistics  
8000 North Stadium Drive  
Houston, TX 77054

Dr. Ronald W. Hanks, Registrar  
Ms. Annie M. Sampson, Deputy Registrar  
Ms. Debra Isaac, Counter/Correspondence Supervisor

### Definition of a Qualified Applicant

Vital records are exempt from the Texas Open Records Act. Only the person named on the certificate or a member of the immediate family may obtain a copy of the certificate. The immediate family could include father, mother, sister, brother, grandparent, grandchild or stepparent. Aunts, uncles and cousins are not usually considered immediate family members. A person claiming to be a member of the immediate family, but with a different last name must show documentation of the relationship or provide a letter of authorization.

If a father's name does not appear on a birth certificate, he must provide other proof of the relationship or a letter, signed by the mother, authorizing him to pick up the certificate. Those seeking a certificate for legal reasons must provide documentary proof of the legal need. For example, a person needing a copy of a death certificate for insurance purposes should bring a copy of the policy naming them as beneficiary.

Lawyers and those representing legal firms, insurance companies, financial institutions, etc. should provide a letter on the firm's letterhead stating the exact legal need for the certificate as well as the documentation mentioned above. Private investigators and document services must provide signed authorization from an immediate family member. If representing a firm the applicant must bring all of the above documentation as well as a signed authorization from the firm to act as their agent.

### Certificates on File in Vital Statistics

Virtually all births and deaths that have occurred within the city of Houston since 1915 are on file including areas of Houston outside of Harris County. In addition, some records of county births and deaths are available.

**(Continued on page 4)**

## Vital Statistics, continued

A limited number of death records between 1872-1915 and birth certificates between 1892-1915 are also available.

Certification of Birth Facts are available for most people born in Texas from 1926 to the present. These certifications are legal for most purposes but may not be acceptable to the Passport Office.

### Applying by Mail

Correspondence requests take 1-3 weeks to process. Please call the office for current turnaround times.

When writing, please give the name on the certificate, the name of the father, the maiden name of the mother, the date of birth or death and the place of occurrence. When requesting a death certificate, please give the name of the funeral home that filed, if possible. Remember to include a return address and enclose a copy of the requestor's picture ID.

Money orders are preferred and checks with the requestor's name, address and telephone number imprinted and numbered 500 or above are acceptable. Credit card orders are accepted for an extra \$5.00 fee.

### Applying In Person

When applying in person, the wait is generally less than 30 minutes. The period around the noon hour and the months of July and August are extremely busy and the wait may be longer. Records prior to 1970 are not on the computer system and will take 45 minutes to an hour. Applicants must provide a picture identification. If you do not have identification, fill out the application and take it to the information window.

### Errors on Certificates

Once a certificate has been filed in the HDHHS' Vital Statistics office it is a legal document and cannot be changed.

Amendments to the certificate may be filed to correct errors. This is done by completing an amendment application and mailing it to Austin along with the amendment fee which ranges from \$15 to \$20 depending on the type of amendment.

Amendment forms and fees are available at the HDHHS Vital Statistics office.

### How Soon After an Event is the Certificate Available?

Texas law requires that a birth certificate be filed within five days of the birth and that a death certificate or fetal death certificate be filed within ten days. Most death certificates are filed within this period unless it is a

## Vital Statistics Phone Information

Information Telephone (24 hours)	713-247-1686
Información en Español (24 horas)	713-247-1555
Switchboard Operator	713-794-9050
Registrar's Office	713-794-9070
FAX Number	713-794-9991
Credit Card Orders	713-794-9061
Open Monday-Friday	7 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Switchboard, Monday-Friday	8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

medical examiner case. The great majority of birth certificates are not filed in a timely manner.

Generally, it takes at least eight weeks after a birth before the certificate is filed. Most death certificates are available within three to four weeks after the death. The name of the funeral home is needed to find a death certificate.

### Emergency Processing

It is possible for a birth certificate to be processed in a shorter time if there is a clear and justifiable emergency such as leaving the country. The hospital must call the HDHHS Bureau of Vital Statistics, explain the emergency and make an appointment. The applicant is responsible for delivering the certificate to HDHHS. The certificate will be ready in 24 hours. Proof of the departure, such as an airline ticket or a notarized statement is required for emergency processing.

## Birth and Death Certificate Prices

Birth Certificates	\$11.00
Wallet Certification of Birth Facts	\$12.00
Certification (Non-Houston Births)	\$11.00
Death Certificate (First copy)	\$ 9.00
Death Certificate (Extra copies ordered at the same)	\$ 3.00
Search Fee	\$11.00
Credit Card Charge	\$ 5.00
Special Handling Fee	\$15.00
Burial Location Search	\$ 9.00

State law requires a search fee of \$11 is charged whether or not the document is found.

# Hepatitis C, Low Virus on the Funding Pole

*By M. desVignes-Kendrick, MD, MPH - Director, HDHHS*

Public health is the activities of society, usually government, which seek to create the highest level of health for the greatest number of people. Public health accomplishes this task by measuring the disease incidence and prevalence in a community, consulting with the experts and developing strategies that will prevent or reduce future occurrences. The primary tools of public health are epidemiology and biostatistics. While physicians treat one patient at a time, public health is responsible for the development of the strategies and mechanisms that will protect the larger community.

Over the last few months there has been considerable debate nationally and locally regarding the public health response to hepatitis C. Hepatitis C has languished in viral obscurity. The disease had no name and was known only as non-A/non-B hepatitis until 1989 when it was isolated through molecular cloning. Unlike another lethal viral infection, HIV, hepatitis C had no face and no advocacy group to give voice to its urgency. The federal public health establishment has yet to prioritize hepatitis C with dedicated resources forcing it to compete for attention and support which remain from other worthy and proven programs such as tuberculosis control, polio elimination and blood lead screening.

Hepatitis C is a nearly perfect virus. It incubates in the host undetected for up to thirty years before causing illness, all the while with potential for infecting others. Perhaps the most important hepatitis C prevention mechanism was implemented in 1992 when the nations blood suppliers began screening for and excluding infected donated blood.

Hepatitis C presents a two fold-challenge to public health authorities. The local public health challenge is to determine the scope of the outbreak among those already infected, to estimate the number of infected who will develop various levels of liver disease and to prepare the medical community to meet the needs of those who are, or will become, ill. For those who are ill, the health care system must ensure that medical providers have the appropriate resources to care for the patients. For those who are infected but not ill, public health and medical providers must educate them on maintaining liver health: no alcohol, no liver damaging drugs or medications, improved diet and rest. The infected must also be warned of their risks for exposing others to the disease.

For those who are not infected, the public health challenge is to identify the remaining routes of exposure and reduce them. Our public health system must discover and disseminate the facts about the disease before our community is overwhelmed with myth and misinformation.



***Dr. desVignes-Kendrick***

For the infected and the non-infected the most important public health tool does not yet exist: data about the disease. Until we have a better understanding of the routes of transmission, i.e. sexual, intravenous drug use, tattoos, occupational exposures, etc.; the various co-factors, i.e. drugs, alcohol, poverty, national origin; and the scope of infection in our community, prevention efforts may be tragically inefficient.

Undoubtedly, hepatitis C deserves all of the diligence public health has to offer. Unfortunately, the funding streams to support disease surveillance have not materialized in the 11 years since hepatitis C was identified.

A few small pilot projects, including Houston, have developed across the country targeting those believed to be at highest risk, intravenous drug users and people seeking treatment for sexually transmitted disease. Until the funding pipeline is turned on, local public health authorities will be forced to rob from Peter to pay Paul for even the smallest of pilot projects.

The first step in priming the funding pipeline is local blinded surveillance studies that will provide information about the scope of the disease without bias to community, ethnicity, gender or insurance status. Once the data is collected and analyzed, targeted prevention and intervention programs can be developed which will reduce new infections while easing the concerns of the worried well.

The Houston Department of Health and Human Services has developed a plan for a prevalence study of hepatitis C in Houston. We are integrating hepatitis C prevention education into existing health education programs. Like most other local public health departments, we may be forced to take funds from existing programs to pay for this one. Some experts believe that hepatitis C will dwarf HIV in prevalence and it may be true. But without the supporting data, we will only know this too late.

## Time Out For Picnic Food Serving



Are you planning a tailgate party, a company picnic or a weekend get-together? A few well-planned steps may mean the difference between a food safety nightmare and sure success.

Although you may see ants and other crawling insects outdoors, it is not possible to see, taste or smell harmful microorganisms that may cause illness if food served is mishandled. Make sure that you pack food safety in your carryout box or picnic basket before leaving.

Warm temperatures are ideal for bacteria and other harmful pathogens to multiply and cause foodborne illness. Pathogens grow best between 41°F and 140°F. Potentially hazardous foods transported without proper temperature control will not stay safe for long. Please make a note of the following to avoid giving friends, relatives and guests an unwelcome "Summer Bug!"

- **PLAN AHEAD.** Plan the right amount of food so that you will not have to worry about the storage of leftovers.
- Foods cooked ahead need to be cooked in adequate time to thoroughly chill in the refrigerator. Store and transport the food with sufficient ice or refrigeration to **MAINTAIN FOODS** at 41°F or lower.

- Carryout foods such as fried chicken and barbecue should be consumed by the guest within two hours or pack ahead of time to store **REFRIGERATED**.
- Divide large quantities of bulk foods into **SHALLOW CONTAINERS** for quick cooling and quick reheating outdoors.
- If you are catering, keep all meat and poultry refrigerated to minimize bacterial growth. Use insulated coolers, ice packs, refrigerated containers on trucks to ensure safe temperature. When handling raw meats, remove from the cooler only the amount that will fit the cooking needs.
- Pack salads, deli meats and other cold items by nesting dishes in containers of ice.
- When outdoors, keep the coolers and other food storage equipment in the shade. Keep the lid closed and **AVOID FREQUENT OPENING**. Do not forget to replenish ice in the cooler as it melts.
- If entertaining, set out only **SMALL AMOUNTS** of food at a time and replace with fresh food rather than adding fresh food to a dish that already has food in it.
- Use **SEPARATE COOLERS** for drinks so the food containers will not be constantly opened and closed.
- **KEEP HOT FOOD HOT** until served. Use a chafing dish, warming tray, steam table, slow cooking pot or on the side of the cooking grill.

- To destroy all harmful microorganisms, **COOK ALL MEATS** properly. Keep a product thermometer available to check the internal temperature.

### • ENJOY YOUR OUTING!

For this, or any food-safety-related information, please contact the HDHHS Bureau of Consumer Health Services at 713/794-9200.

### **Advisory Council Newsnotes**

*is published quarterly by the*

- M. desVignes-Kendrick, MD, MPH
- Kathy Barton
- Marty Blaise
- Rita Rodriguez

Call 713-794-9317 to report news

### **Houston Department of Health and Human Services**

*8000 N. Stadium Dr.,  
Houston, Texas 77054*

Director  
Chief, Office of Public Affairs  
Editor  
Senior Community Liaison

